

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A ROMANCE OF MODERN DAYS.

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CHAPTER VIII. LEARNING HER PART.

PENELOPE bore the ordeal of dress with as much patience as she possessed. She did not fully understand her own beauty, and she thought that dress would make her more attractive and more likely to succeed in the object that had brought her and her uncle to London.

She felt more and more like a prisoner, as she realised that Mrs. Todd's society rules were very tiresome. She must take care of her complexion, she must not be seen before her attire was perfect, and she must have her dresses described by the society papers.

The country maiden was too proud to show her surprise at the new code of behaviour that was poured into her ears, so that Mrs. Todd, besides admiring her beauty, looked upon her as the most self-contained girl she had ever met, and silently wondered at her self-possession and worldliness. The first day she had been inclined to think this romantic Princess slightly wanting in animation, but having hinted that cheerfulness and smiles were great helps to social success, she saw Penelope's eyes suddenly flash, as she said:

"Even if they mean nothing!"

"They mean, of course, that a woman is glad she is pleasing others."

"I don't know yet if I can please, but I shall be very glad if I succeed."

Mrs. Todd was silenced when she heard her own code explained so baldly.

"We women have to pretend a great deal, my dear; in fact, we are always pretending, I suppose, but it pleases the men. We pretend that we think them good and clever, when in reality very few of them possess either quality, and none of them have both together."

Lady Farrant came the next day to call upon Miss Winskell. She had heard so much of her from the Duke, that she had told her husband that the girl was probably neither clever nor beautiful.

Lady Farrant belonged to the modern type of society. She was an heiress who had taken care that her fortune should be well secured, for she did not mean to be beggared by an easy-going husband.

"Bob is a jolly good fellow," she told her intimates, "but no more fit to handle money than to be Prime Minister." She had promised to keep the house going in proper style, but she would not pay his private bills when he ran short, and somehow Bob was always "running short," or he was lavishly generous. He loved gambling, but so long as he kept within due bounds his wife did not lecture him.

When Lady Farrant entered the Eaton Square drawing-room of the Winskells, and saw before her a tall girl with exquisite hair; dark, liquid eyes; a beautiful mouth and a strong chin; she almost stopped short from surprise and delight.

"What a lucky find! The men were right. The girl will make a sensation, and I shall have the credit of bringing her out."

She thought this and then greeted her with a great show of affection, but suddenly remembering the fact that the Princess was poor, she was more cautious than she had at first intended.

"Milly Todd has told me how quite delighted she is to be with you, Miss Winskell. I can trust her to tell you all that is necessary. Have you given all the orders about the Drawing-room dress, Milly? Your young friend must enjoy herself, and I predict a great success for her."

"It is very kind of you to take so much trouble for me. I know my uncle's friends have been very kind," said Penelope.

"Yes, of course. Bob said it was quite a joke his turning up after all these years. Oh, you will soon be 'au fait' at everything. Girls in our own day catch up all the right things in no time. We are to have several 'lions' at the ball. I think young people ought to enjoy themselves. I take care that the men dance and don't stand doing nothing in the doorways. When people tell me that young men are not as they used to be, I tell them it's their own fault. It's no use spoiling them. I give them good warning when they come to our house that there is no standing room for them. I give a ball for my guests to dance, otherwise they must keep away. I never have any trouble, and the girls have real good times—just as I had when I was young."

Lady Farrant flowed on like a swift though not a noisy stream, and was less tiresome to listen to than was Mrs. Todd.

"By the way, Milly, I have invited the Duke to our small dinner-party on Saturday. It's only a men's party, and I leave them alone; but my brother will escort us to the play. Irving is playing Wolsey on that day, and it will interest Miss Winskell. Do you like plays?"

"I have never been to one," said Penelope; "this is my first visit to London."

Lady Farrant smiled good-naturedly.

"Well! really! It is quite delightful to have a perfectly unsophisticated 'débutante.' I give you ten days to become worldly, and the change will be amusing."

"She is worldly already," said Mrs. Todd, smiling.

Penelope felt quite out of her element with these women; but she listened, and learnt her new part. She had imposed this task on herself and meant to learn it well. Then suddenly she lost herself in the day dreams she had conjured up on the hillside. She could not realise yet that the old life was gone. She would go back to her glen, but would she then be another Penelope? The thought seemed to take away all the old moorings, at the same

time that it made her stretch out her hand towards them. This big, new world she saw now was peopled with persons who did not seem to have any strong purpose; they appeared to be like toy boats on the sea, driven hither and thither almost aimlessly, except when forced forward by the impetus of the tide.

If she meant to attain her object she must become like them, so they said; she must appear light-hearted, and she must laugh. Her uncle, who had done so much for her, should not be disappointed. He had taken so much trouble and such infinite pains, that on her side she must do her best to please him. What was love in comparison with the welfare of the Winskells? The property must soon be sold if—if—

The Princess had only to think of that and all her courage revived. She would not shrink from the task set before her.

A week later Penelope Winskell had won the difficult position of a recognised society beauty. How it had ever been accomplished was a mystery to herself, though Mrs. Todd thought it was owing to her own management, and to Lady Farrant's "able steering," as she expressed it.

It is not by any means every beautiful girl who comes to London with the secret wish to become fashionable who attains this object.

With Penelope Winskell there were several things which contributed to the desired end. In the first place she was certainly beautiful, and possessed a complexion which had resisted her out-of-door life, and so could resist London fatigue. In the second place, society was half amused, half credulous, and wholly pleased by the quiet manner with which the Winskells claimed their titles of courtesy.

The handsome Duke accompanying his beautiful niece also helped to conquer society, and very soon, in that mysterious manner the origin of which is unknown, the whisper ran:

"Have you seen the Princess?"

"What Princess? Who is she?"

"Oh, don't you know? She belongs to a very ancient family who possess titles, by courtesy of course."

Every one wished to see the Princess, and invitation cards were showered down upon the house in Eaton Square where she was known to be residing for the season. Carriages drove up in a goodly

array, and Lady Farrant and Mrs. Todd began to congratulate themselves that they had nobly launched Penelope Winskell.

Instead of despising the country girl, Mrs. Todd began to shower compliments upon her, which Penelope received with the same quiet coldness as she had accepted the information that she was very country-fied. She had her aim in view, and to her Mrs. Todd was of no consequence whatever. Still the battle was not yet won. The Princess had not been written about in all the society papers, so Lady Farrant determined to give a *fête*—she liked the word better than a party—and to make the papers mention “the unique guest,” as she herself had named her.

As for Penelope herself, she had one happy hour in the day. This was the hour before dinner, when she sat with her uncle and talked over what she had seen and done during the day. He could not help noticing the change in her—the sparkle in her eyes, the style added to her natural graceful figure, and the brighter repartee. She was learning the ways of the world, and learning the lesson quickly. Once, after one of Penelope’s quaint little satirical sketches, he caught himself making a mental comparison between the Princess in the glen and the one now in town.

“Well, Penzie, so the big world does not seem to you quite so much like a prison now as it did at first. Look at this evening’s society paper; you head the list of—”

Penelope put the paper away with her hand. Her pride revolted against common notice.

“You are glad about it, uncle. You know that is all I care for. We went to two ‘at homes’ to-day, and I was introduced to a great many persons I did not care about. But I wanted to show you all these cards. Our neighbours are beginning to call in crowds. These are cards from Lord and Lady Rookwood. Isn’t he a cousin of that Mr. Bethune whom Mr. Gillbanks mentioned? Some one said so.”

The Duke examined the cards deliberately.

“Yes. By the way, I heard again of this young Bethune somewhere the other day. A very modern excitable young man who goes in for Socialistic ideas.”

“But you said he belonged to an old family.”

“Yes, certainly he does, but Socialism

is fashionable. Young men think the reformer’s vocabulary will bring them into notice. In my youth we kept people of that stamp in their right place.”

“I will ask Mrs. Todd to come and return the call; I should like to see Mr. Bethune. If he talks to me I could tell him how mistaken you think him.”

The Duke smiled.

“I fear he is too far gone, unless—”

The Duke paused. Then he added carelessly:

“They are, as a family, very much impoverished by the failure of their land, I hear. Besides, they were never very rich.”

Penelope took one of her uncle’s hands in hers. The look of love in her eyes was reserved for him alone. Indeed, in Penelope’s life, he alone could call up that look. She had, however, hardly listened to his last remark, being anxious about another matter.

“Where did you go last night, uncle, when we were at the theatre? Lady Farrant brought her son with her. He tried to amuse us, but I was so much interested in the play that I hardly answered his remarks.”

“That youth has not half his mother’s wits!”

“But where were you? I thought you would be at home when we came back.”

“Ah! I was rather late. We have a little club for whist playing, and, yes, we stayed rather late. Do you think I show signs of weariness?” he asked, a little anxiously.

“No—I hope not, because you are doing it for me.”

“Well, the doing seems pleasant enough, child. Don’t trouble your head about me. Enjoy yourself. That is all I ask of you.”

Penelope stood up and laughed.

“I am doing that; yes, I wonder at myself, but I try not to think of the glen and of the Rothery. If I begin to think, then I hear it splashing, and then I fancy I am walking straight up the path, and that I am standing on the hillside looking at the tops of the mountains, just as the last gleam of gold has faded away.”

“Poetry is at a discount in this big city,” said the Duke, with one of his ironical smiles. “Now, I will accompany you to the ball this evening. You are a fortunate individual. Do you know, Lord Rookwood’s house is one of the most sought after in town.”

“Perhaps I shall see the Bethunes

there. Do you think we shall meet Mr. Gillbanks again? Surely he is not in good society!"

"Oh, he is immensely rich—I told you so. The firm has money enough to buy up all Mr. Bethune's estates if it liked."

Penelope raised her head slightly.

"But people cannot care about a 'nouveau riche.'"

The Duke said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders. During the dinner-hour he was rather silent, and Mrs. Todd enjoyed almost a solo.

"You will look charming, my dear Princess, in that cloud of blue, as if a bit of the sky had suddenly descended. They say that Lady Rookwood is a very jealous woman, and will not let her husband talk to the pretty girls. We must not go late to the Rookwoods'; they are people who like punctuality, which the fast set despise, but they are very proper people, though quite a young couple. Now I must help the maid to see to our dresses. I am glad your uncle will come with us, for his presence makes the 'éclat' greater."

So she prattled on, but the Duke and Penelope were no longer listening.

PREACHING AND PREACHERS.

WHAT cleric was it who asked Garrick how it was that actors affected, or seemed to affect, their hearers so much more than preachers? There was some truth in Garrick's reply: "Because we speak of unreal things as if they were real, while you speak of real things as if they were unreal." It certainly is a fact that the average sermon, to say the best of it, is delivered as if it were a lesson learned by rote, and not a favourite lesson either. Few and far between are the preachers who preach as if they were themselves impressed by the truth, the reality, and the paramount importance of what they themselves are preaching. I have heard famous preachers in many different parts of the world, but I think that I should not require more than the fingers of one hand to enable me to number those who struck me as feeling what they themselves were saying.

Eloquent preachers one has heard in plenty. Not a few, too, who have attained to a high standard of eloquence. But something more than eloquence is needed if one wishes one's words to leave

an impression, either for good or for ill, upon the lives of one's hearers. Eloquence is an intellectual exercise. It is not merely by means of an intellectual exercise that one gains an entrance to men's hearts. The actor knows this. He appeals to the feelings. He wishes his hearers to believe that he feels strongly; knowing that, if he can only induce that belief in them, they will feel strongly too.

It is true that there are preachers who appeal to the feelings. So far they go with the actor. Unfortunately for themselves, and for the cause which they profess to have at heart, as a rule they go no farther. They appear to be oblivious of the fact that, in order to appeal strongly to the feelings of others, it is necessary, first of all, to feel oneself. In the case of the actor it is only the appearance, the close imitation of feeling, which is absolutely requisite. In the case of the preacher no imitation, however close, will do at all. It must be the genuine thing.

The reason of this is simple. An audience goes to a theatre desiring to be deceived. If what took place upon the stage were real, the performance would not be suffered to continue for a moment. If we knew that the actor who impersonates Macbeth had really slain the actor who impersonates Duncan, not improbably the representative of the Thane of Cawdor would be lynched upon the spot. If the villain of melodrama really perpetrated, night after night, a tithe of the villainies of which he is supposed to be guilty, a frenzied mob would raze the theatre to the ground. We know that we are only looking on at make-believe, and it is because we know it that we wish those who are making believe to do it well.

In the case of the preacher it is all the other way. We do not go to the preacher to be deceived. We go to be convinced. In the pulpit acting is not only ineffective, it is worse than ineffective. Instead of gaining our sympathies it repels them. The idea that a man is endeavouring to convince us by pretending to be convinced himself, so far from propitiating us, rouses our indignation. It is almost impossible to conceal the fact that it is pretence. The actor has everything in his favour when he attempts concealment; the preacher, or the orator, has nothing. The assumption of disguise, the arrangement of the lights, the whole construction of the theatre, these things

are all intended to assist illusion; in the pulpit, or on the platform, everything tends to destroy it. More, should there, in the pulpit, be any attempt to assist illusion, even in the slightest degree, so far from welcoming it, we should resent the attempt with scorn, and with disgust.

No. The preacher must produce his effects naturally; from within, not from without. Art can do nothing for him. He may polish his phrases as he pleases; it is doubtful if they will gain him access to a single heart that is worth the entering. He may cultivate emotion, he may simulate hysterics; neither the one nor the other will get him "forrarder."

Let there be no misunderstanding; it is not suggested that a "fool preacher" may not influence fools. Still less is such a suggestion made of knaves. Mr. Honeyman is found in the present year of grace, outside the pages of Thackeray's novel. But Mr. Honeyman appeals, and always will appeal, to a peculiar congregation. The fools we have always with us. It is because this is an eternal truth that Mr. Honeyman still lives, moves, and has his being. But no lasting impression was ever made upon a large body of persons by the Mr. Honeymans. Such an effect is more likely to be produced by the Joe Smiths. They, at least, have the courage of their convictions—or of what they declare to be their convictions.

If the tales which are handed down to us of the effects which were produced by Savonarola are not exaggerated, we may take it for granted that those effects were produced, not by his eloquence, but by his earnestness. In one respect his age was very much like ours. Earnestness was perhaps as rare in Florence as it is in England now. A man in real earnest, especially a man of genius in real earnest, was a phenomenon indeed.

One hears a great deal about the lack of good preachers. I, for my part, wonder what people mean when they speak of good preachers. Do they mean eloquent preachers? It is beyond dispute that eloquence is not given to every man, but still, there are to-day eloquent preachers in all the countries of the world. Do they mean scholarly preachers? They, too, are to be found. I myself have heard, in churches and chapels of all denominations, men who, judged by average standards, might fairly be called good preachers. It might be invidious to name names, but is there a sect in England

which cannot claim to have good preachers? I have heard orators in Roman Catholic churches, many of them. I have heard them in Protestant churches and chapels. Ay, and I have heard them at street-corners.

But the average standard is not necessarily a high standard. What, judged by the highest standard, is a good preacher? A good preacher is, or should be, a man who so demonstrates a thing that all who listen to his demonstration shall accept it as proved. A good preacher is, therefore, a man who does this superlatively well. How many good preachers, judged by that standard, have we in the present year of grace? If a man tells you that good is better than evil, and demonstrates this clearly, it is certain, if you are offered the choice of one of the two, that you will choose the good. How is it that so many people choose the evil? There is an abundance of preachers. They preach to us on every topic beneath the sun. Is it because the preachers are bad, their demonstrations imperfect?

One is sometimes constrained to think that if there were fewer preachers, and if they preached to us on fewer topics, the result of their preaching would be more. It is not only that they contradict each other. It is not only that some speak faintly on just those points on which others shout out loudest. There are so many of them. There is not a road, not even a footpath, on which they will let us walk alone. There are too many guides. They not only want to guide us up the Matterhorn, they insist upon guiding us up Primrose Hill. The people of this world are becoming divided into two parts: those who are preachers, and those who are not. Those who are not preachers are not only in a minority, it would almost seem as if they were in a minority which is growing less and less. Soon the preachers will have no one to preach to but each other. Then there will be peace in all the land.

Under such circumstances is it not allowable to suggest that there may be cause for thankfulness in the fact that the good preachers are few and far between? If they were all good preachers, where should we be? If each one of them with whom we came in contact were to be endowed with the power to move us to conviction, what kaleidoscopic lives we should be compelled to lead! There is a story told somewhere of a certain individual who went on a journey round the

world. He must have been a person with what has been called, of late, an "open mind," or else he must have encountered "persuaders" of exceptional calibre. He was not a traveller, properly so termed. He was what we style a "globe-trotter." He ran round the world in a year, or thereabouts, as, nowadays, so many people do. And yet, by the time he returned from whence he came, he had been "converted," it would almost seem, to every creed under the sun.

This individual, whom we will call Perkins, started as an Episcopalian. On the outward voyage he collogued with a Presbyterian missionary. This missionary was such a powerful proselytiser that, by the time they reached Cairo, Mr. Perkins was a Presbyterian. He sojourned in Egypt. While there he fell in with a young Mahometan gentleman, who made so strong an impression on his mind that, by the time he continued his journey, he would have been willing to suffer martyrdom for the truth of the saying, "There is only one God, and Mahomet is his prophet." It chanced that, on the ship which took them to Ceylon, there was a member of the Society of Jesus, a charming man. He made a constant companion of Mr. Perkins. When the ship touched at Colombo, Mr. Perkins had again undergone conversion. He had pinned his faith to the Sovereign Pontiff, believing him to be the Keeper of the Keys. He had become a Buddhist, not an Esoteric Buddhist, after the Blavatsky - Olcott pattern, but a real, "whole hog" Buddhist, before he left the land of "spicy breezes." While steaming to Calcutta, a Unitarian carried conviction both to his heart and to his intellect. He became a Parsee while in the "City of Palaces," possibly yielding to some occult fascination exercised by the near neighbourhood of the Towers of Silence. When he arrived at Melbourne he was a Hard-shell Baptist. He was several things while in Australia. Falling in love, as he was leaving it, with a Jewess, he almost became a Jew. But, on her throwing him over, he meditated attaching himself to the Greek Church, probably because he had in his mind's eye the Russian persecution of the Jews, and, at least in that respect, he would have liked to have allied himself with the subjects of the Czar. When he landed at San Francisco he was an avowed Free-thinker. Between the Golden Horn and Sandy Hook he was so many different

things that it would be difficult to give a list of them.

You think that Mr. Perkins must have been a curious character? True. He must have been. Yet, if good preachers abounded, say, even to the extent of one per cent. of the whole company of the preachers, we might be as he was. Indeed, we probably should be as he was. We should chop and change, and change and chop. We should undergo as many variations as there are hairs in our head. Our only safety would be to confine ourselves to a given groove. Having been convinced by Mr. Boanerges, if we wished to maintain our character for mental stability, we should be unwise to trust ourselves out of the range of the voice of Mr. Boanerges, lest, coming within sound of the voice of Mr. Smoothtongue, we should immediately become converts to the other side. No. Considering all things, regarding the question from a wide and a comprehensive point of view, it is, perhaps, not an unmitigated misfortune that good preachers are not more abundant than they are.

Still, on the other hand, one is entitled to wish that some of them were better than they are. Surely, if a nincompoop is out of place anywhere, it is in the pulpit. And yet it is amazing what a number of nincompoops are to be found there. A man may be, and, indeed, often is, a good parson and a bad preacher. Until it is understood that a parson need not preach unless he can preach, and yet shall have no cause to be ashamed, we shall have to bear the ills we have. This really is a subject on which a little plain speaking is required. If a man were to turn author, and were to publish works which only went to show that he had absolutely no knowledge of grammar, of the rules of composition, or of spelling: that, in short, he was absolutely without knowledge of any sort or kind: to put it mildly, we should smile at him. Yet, when a man of this type sets himself up to preach, some people seem to think that we ought to hold the man in reverence. Which resolves itself into this: if a man is too great a fool to make a mark at anything else, he is sure to make his mark at preaching. Strange logic, surely! No wonder the bad preachers are as the sands of the sea for multitude.

It is bad enough to encounter preachers of the impossible type in open spaces, or at street-corners. It is worse when we are confronted by them in the pulpits of our

churches and our chapels. It would be interesting, in this connection, to ascertain what exactly are the qualifications which each of the denominations expects its preachers to possess. One may be forgiven for surmising that the only qualification which the Church of England insists upon is a social one. It should be remembered that a social qualification necessitates a certain degree of education, but one so often finds in church pulpits preachers who have gentlemanly manners and, apparently, nothing else! Something more than gentlemanly manners is required in a preacher. The Congregational standard is, in one sense, a much higher one. With the Congregational minister preaching is all in all. If he cannot preach he is foredoomed to failure. You never meet in Congregational pulpits quite such bad preachers as you meet in Episcopalian ones. On the other hand, the Congregational minister is seldom much above the level of his congregation. This follows as a matter of course, since each congregation chooses the minister who, at their price, is most to their taste. The best preachers get the best incomes. Therefore, again, it follows that the poorest congregations are only too apt to get the worst preachers. Wesleyan Methodism is a compromise between church and chapel. At any rate, congregations do not choose their own ministers. Still, they are allowed a certain amount of variety, and are not constrained to always listen to the same incapable. It would be impossible, perhaps, to say in a few words what the Wesleyan minister's qualification exactly is, but it certainly is not a preaching one. I have heard as bad preachers in Wesleyan pulpits as it would be possible to hear. On the other hand, it is only fair to add that I have heard many whom it would be hard to beat. In the Roman Catholic Church a priest is not by any means necessarily a preacher. It is possible that he has never preached a sermon in his life, and that he never will. A sermon is very far from being an essential part of the Roman ritual. The consequence is that when you do hear a sermon in a Catholic Church, you are pretty certain not to be confronted by the spectacle of a man attempting to do something for which, either by nature or by education, he is altogether unsuited.

If you think it out, the odd part of the business is that no one criticises a preacher so keenly as his own congregation. For this, doubtless, there is sufficient reason.

It is upon them, first and foremost, that the burden is laid. The chief topic of conversation as the congregations, whether of churches or of chapels, are walking home after service, is the sermon. If the preacher has made a hash of it, as, in the estimation of some of his hearers, he is almost certain to have done, how frank, how outspoken, the criticisms are! Do not suppose that congregations do not know when they have a bad preacher. They know it well—too well. And yet they suffer. And they go on suffering. It does not appear to have occurred to any one that bad preachers should not be encouraged to preach.

But if the professional preacher is, now and then, slightly trying, the amateur preacher is, almost invariably, altogether intolerable. And it is the voice of the amateur preacher which, nowadays, is heard in all the land. He does not necessarily touch on theological topics. Morals and social subjects are more in his line. Not long since I was at a friend's house. After supper some one said something about vaccination. Suddenly a man began to hurl statistics and statements at our heads in a fashion which paralysed us all. He was an amateur preacher, whose line was anti-vaccination. He was one against many, yet the many were beaten by the one. I know nothing about anti-vaccination, I want to know nothing. It is not a subject for which I am desirous either to live or to die. I had no moral doubt that all his statistics were wrong, and his statements too, though I was not able there and then to prove them wrong.

On this point I once heard rather a good story of how an amateur preacher was hoisted by his own petard.

This amateur's topic was opium. "Down with opium, the curse of India, China, and other countries!" and that sort of thing. It was in a private company. He had been reeling off the usual mass of figures, and as no one knew anything about the subject except himself, or cared anything for it either, his figures held the field, until a man, who had hitherto been silent, began to speak. He directly controverted that amateur preacher's statements. He, too, produced figures of his own. The amateur preacher was first amazed, then cowed, then roused to battle. The figures which the assailants hurled at each other darkened the air. But the amateur preacher's were no match for the other man's. We asked

that other man, the amateur preacher being gone, whence his figures came. He told us from his own head. They were the inventions of the moment. Seeing that we wondered, he explained that he had had a considerable experience of amateur preachers. He had suffered from them, sorely. And his sufferings had taught him that amateur preachers were apt to get up their sermons, for that is what too often they amount to, in an amateur sort of way. Their figures, imperfectly assimilated at first, become more and more dubious quantities as time goes on, until very shortly they become, as they well may become, so uncertain of the literal correctness of their own figures, that they are altogether incapable of proving the incorrectness of the figures of others. Therefore, when an amateur preacher begins to hurl figures, this man hurls figures back again, inventing them as he goes on—exhibiting considerable mental agility in the process, too. Nine times out of ten the amateur preacher is confounded.

I have taken this story to heart. When my maiden aunt, who is an amateur preacher of a particularly painful kind, throws testotal statistics at my head, I throw what I hope I may, without impropriety, call alcoholic statistics—little inventions of my own—back at hers. They confuse her dreadfully, and I have noticed that she is becoming less and less inclined to preach at me.

Bi-metallism is a subject upon which, just now, amateur preachers are holding forth. I never met a bi-metallist—or, for the matter of that, a monometallist either—whose arguments I could not rout, acting on the afore-mentioned gentleman's hint. Not that I know anything about bi-metallism. I do not. Indeed I am arriving by degrees at the fixed conviction that no one knows anything about bi-metallism. No, not one. I have met men who are supposed to be authorities on the subject, but I never yet met one who was able to make it really clear to the understandings of others, or even to make it clear that he really and truly understood it himself.

It certainly does seem to be at least probable that the less some amateur preachers know about their subjects, the more dogmatic they are apt to be upon them. I am acquainted with one of the fraternity whose subject is criminal reform. His idea is—I do not know where he

got it from, but I presume from somewhere—that the less you punish criminals, the more likely you are to diminish crime. So far from punishing an offender against the law, you are to make a sort of pet of him. You are to take him away from his criminal associations, and introduce him to respectable houses and model families, and so instil into him imperceptibly, by force of example, a love of higher things. It seems to be rather a funny idea to me, and based on an insufficient knowledge of human nature. But I may not have got it quite correctly. His elucidation of the idea is a very trying one to listen to. But I do know that he supports it, or at least that he imagines that he supports it, by an appalling display of statistics. The word appalling is used advisedly. He is one of those persons who, directly they come into contact with questions of arithmetic, are immediately at sea. The mess he makes of those statistics is horrible to witness. This is the sort of thing:

"Last year there were three thousand four hundred and seventy-eight convictions of all sorts. Of these twelve thousand nine hundred and seventy-six were for misdemeanours, twenty-nine thousand five hundred and thirty were for felony, and the rest were for drunkenness. Of the convictions for drunkenness thirty-six thousand four hundred and ninety-seven were first convictions, while the balance of no less than sixty-seven thousand eight hundred and twenty-three had been convicted more than once. Now for the due and proper custody of these criminals there were required five thousand seven hundred and twenty-nine prisons, and one hundred and forty-four warders and other officers. The total cost to the nation was, in round figures, half a million sterling, or fourteen shillings and threepence per head per annum, or nineteen pounds eighteen shillings and twopence per week; while the sum paid in salaries alone amounted to over a couple of millions. If these were placed side by side they would form a tower three feet wide and eighteen thousand feet thick. While if the pounds were reduced to sovereigns—I mean, that is, if the pennies were reduced to pounds, and were placed one above the other, they would form a bridge across the Channel a hundred feet long, and five-and-twenty miles in width. Now, if you come to consider—what did I say was the number of first offenders?"

He pauses. He consults his notes; then

his memory. It is difficult to say which muddles him most. Yet he maunders on. There is nothing to show that he would not maunder on for ever if he could get any one to listen.

The man is sane—the picture is, perhaps, a little over-coloured. But he is as incapable of preaching, as he himself might say, in one of his paroxysms of muddle, as the “beasts of the air.” Preach he will. What is more, he meditates standing for Parliament, with the view of pressing his theories on the attention of the representatives of the nation. It is a fact. There will be some pleasant hours in that abode of pleasantness when he gets there.

I once answered an advertisement which stated that a furnished house was to let. The house was in the country. I was to meet the proprietor in town, and we were to go down together to see it. When I met him he asked me if I did not know his name—which, we will say, was Jones. I observed that I did not remember having heard it before. He appeared surprised.

“I thought everybody knew it by now. I’ve been at it long enough.”

“At what?” I asked.

“Preaching the doctrine of Art for the Elevation and Regeneration of the Masses.”

“Oh!” I said.

He explained. It seemed that he was of opinion that if every wall—the walls of our living-rooms, sleeping-rooms, kitchens, offices, churches, chapels, public buildings—were covered, from floor to ceiling, with pictures, the effect on the lives of those who had to live with them would, in time, be indescribable. I felt that it would, though perhaps not altogether in the direction he suggested. He went on to add that he had put his theory into practice in the house which we were then going to see. I looked forward to the worst—or I thought I did. My anticipations, however, fell far short of the reality. Anything like the “pictures” with which he had covered the walls of the house which he wanted to let, furnished, with them as part of the furniture, I never saw. And the way in which they were hung! There was not an inch of space between any two of them. They concealed the walls like a mosaic. And the miscreant told me, actually with a chuckle, that there were, I don’t know how many hundreds, or thousands, of them, and that, though they were all “real” oil paintings, they had only “stood him in, frame and

all,” I think, something like eight and sixpence apiece. Seldom have I breathed more freely than when I quitted that “picture” haunted house.

If the cobbler would but stick to his last! If people would only leave preaching to those who are competent to preach! I take it that it is to indulge in a wild dream to hope that they ever will. Preaching lends a man an air of importance, or he thinks that it does. And we do so like to think ourselves important!

THE AMERICAN HOUSE BEAUTIFUL.

THE untravelled or travelled and unobservant Briton cannot associate the traditional American whom he accepts as a type—and we all know how exceedingly true to nature all traditional national types are!—with the smallest ideas of poetry, imagination, or “soul.” To the said Briton, dollars, their making and their spending, are the sole reason for the American’s existence on this earth. Strange to say, although the Briton is not quite right, he is by no means entirely wrong. Dollars are the essence of the lives of five Americans out of six. They think dollars; they talk dollars; and, no doubt, they dream dollars. But the brightness of the exception goes far to redeem the national character, and more, is rapidly softening the natures of the dollar men. The publication of American magazines in England first showed us that there was plenty of “soul” in the lucre-adoring people across the Atlantic. The marvellous display at the World’s Fair proved to us that Americans possess, not merely a soul to appreciate the imaginative and the beautiful, but the faculty of expressing it in more solid form than print and engraving. As a finishing lesson we would recommend to the still doubtful Briton an examination of the American House Beautiful, in the honest conviction that no absolutely prosaic mind could find pleasure in beautiful surroundings.

We Englishmen are proud, and justly so, of the stately and the cottage homes of our land. There is nothing like them elsewhere in the world, for they possess peculiar features of their own—the former in their antiquity and their associations, the latter in their own beauty and that of their surroundings. But the great mass of us live neither in stately homes nor in

cottages, and of our residences—externally, at any rate—we have very small reason to be proud. Now, as the Americans have no stately homes of our English type, with the exception of the fine old Colonial residences of Virginia and New England; and as their cottage homes are modern, practical, and consequently ugly, and, as we have said, there is a wealth of refinement in many American minds, they have succeeded in making the villa residences of their big city suburbs the most beautiful in the world. I call them "villa residences," despite the fact that many of them are mansions in size and feature, because they are the homes of business men. The town residences of American business men are beautiful internally; but being in streets and rows they necessarily lack the external features which induce us to select the suburban home as a type of the American House Beautiful.

In a survey of these the first fact which strikes the eye of the stranger is the extraordinary fertility of the American architectural brain in original design. A family likeness pervades all London suburban houses, be they north or south of the Thames. If there be one pretty house, there will be scores exactly like it all around; but until within the past very few years the London suburban builder reared as fast, as cheaply, and, in consequence, as inartistically as he could, with the result that the very great majority of London suburban houses are absolutely hideous. But in an American suburb, let us say for example, Brookline, near Boston, a suburb extending over miles of hill and dale, and planted thickly with houses, it may be asserted that not half-a-dozen buildings are exactly alike. The straining after the original and the striking has, of course, resulted in the erection of a few monstrosities, and of some houses more eccentric than pleasing in design, but the general average is exceedingly high.

In this general originality of house design I seem to see a far greater instance of the much-vaunted American liberty and independence, than in any of the political and social institutions of the country.

After we have surveyed the exteriors of the houses and proceed to their interiors, another new fact strikes us, and this is how very much better the different classes of American business men are housed than are their corresponding grades in our own country. Shop-walkers, counter men, and good artisans go home every evening to

houses which in England would not be deemed unworthy of City men of good position. The taste in furnishing and decoration may not always be as good as the houses themselves, but there is nothing corresponding to what may be called our London "genteel villa residence"; and the bank clerk, instead of huddling in one yellow brick box in a long row with a big name, shuts himself up for the evening in his own little detached castle, which contains on a small scale all the accommodation and many more of the conveniences of an English gentleman's house. As we rise higher in the scale we reach the American House Beautiful, as distinguished from the American House Magnificent.

Let us take a random type—the Brookline, or Roxbury, or Dorchester house of a Boston merchant. It will be either a "frame house" of weather-boards, painted white or yellow, or it will be on the fine old Colonial pattern of red brick, with white casemented windows, and a beautiful porch of the type so often seen in English country halls of the Georgian period. In the former case it will be daringly original in shape and feature, full of odd angles and corners and gables; in the latter it will be square and solid, and differing only from its English prototype in the possession of a deep verandah—a necessary institution in hot weather.

We enter a large square hall, furnished and often used as a room, with a large open fireplace, an ample chimney corner, and in the place of the hideous grate, fire-dogs of polished brass or of curiously wrought iron, set in a recess lined with quaint tiles. It is in the furnishing and decoration of their houses that the Americans so astonish the untravelled Briton. Americans travel much, and when they travel they collect, as the British curio and bric-à-brac hunter knows well to his cost, so that we see the dainty porcelain and the curious bronzes of Japan, quaint odds and ends from Italy and Holland, rugs and hangings from Spain and the East, old German ironwork, old English silver and furniture, disposed in the various rooms with such care and taste that our preconceived notions of vulgar ostentation, as associated with the well-to-do American, are shattered at a blow. The owner may be a self-made man, but our national pride is sadly humiliated when we compare the interior of his home with that of some British self-made men we wot of.

Entered from the hall is a beautiful drawing-room, which is sufficient proof that the Woman's Building at the Chicago Fair was no false exemplification of the taste and art of the American woman, so delicate is its decoration, so harmonious its colouring, and, best of all, so homelike and enticing, so absolutely free from the reproach which may be fairly levelled at the average British villa drawing-room—the reproach of looking like a “company” room. A stately dining-room, a billiard-room, and an ample lavatory and cloak-room also lead from the hall—every room, of course, being lighted by electricity, for no gas-lit house would find a tenant in these days.

By the broad and picturesque staircase, with a genuine old English grandfather clock in the angle, we pass to the first floor. Here are the bedrooms, and here are to be noted some of the American domestic features which are immeasurably ahead of ours. The electric system is universal. Just as the American hostess seated at the dinner-table summons the servant by merely pressing a button on the floor with her foot, so can the master of the house light every room on the floors above and below by using one of the half-dozen buttons in the wall of the first landing: a very convenient and efficacious arrangement under such circumstances—extreme ones—as the entrance of burglars into the house. Now why do I say “extreme” circumstances in connection with the entrance of burglars into such a house as I am describing?

Because the undetected entrance of a burglar would be an extreme circumstance, inasmuch as the slightest external interference with any door or window is at once proclaimed through the medium of an ingenious electrical apparatus by the loud ringing of an alarm bell.

“Oh! But you are describing a very superior house!” I hear. Not a bit of it. I have chosen as a type not the residence of a Railway or Pork King, but one of the many hundreds of homes belonging to the well-to-do class of men who work hard for their daily bread and butter.

The bedrooms are spacious, well-lighted, and cheerfully arranged. The ponderous, gloomy furniture of the British bedroom—the great wardrobe, the sarcophagian chest of drawers, the massy washing-stand, and so forth, are absent. Each room has a cupboard as big as many an English dressing-room, and hanging closets. There

are pretty fireplaces with tasteful mantels, for, although every American house is primarily heated by hot air, the English open fireplace is rapidly finding favour on account of its cheerfulness. On each floor of a modern American residence there is at least one bath-room; in many residences each bedroom has its own bath-room. And such bath-rooms! Furnished with all that can make the daily necessity a luxurious indulgence, bright with plated pipes and glimmering marble, lavishly supplied with hot and cold water—compared with them our English bath-room is a mere closet, and we think with humiliation upon the proud emphasis with which we advertise a good house as “containing two bath-rooms”! A third salient fact about the American House Beautiful which impresses the British visitor is the thoroughness and completeness of the arrangements from attic to basement.

It is a notorious fact that often in what are deemed very good class English houses there is very good reason for not taking a visitor very far beyond the reception rooms and some of the bedrooms. Proud housewives are naturally reluctant to shock their visitors by an abrupt transition from gorgeously-decorated and upholstered family rooms to dusky kitchens and stuffy attics. The lady of the American House Beautiful shows her basement floor as readily as she shows her drawing-room. And with reason. Servants are more difficult to get and more expensive to keep in America even than in England. Consequently, all that mechanical ingenuity can do to supply the want is done, and an English housekeeper would go into ecstasies over the furnace arrangement which obviates the necessity of fire-laying and fireplace keeping; over the laundry system; over the presses, and cupboards, and closets, and drawers fitted into every available nook and corner, and yet leaving a clear, well-lighted, open kitchen which would be a Paradise to many a British Mary Jane.

When the Frenchman accentuated his criticism of the Chicago Fair with an expression of wonder, not so much at the beauty of all he saw, but that such a beautiful creation should be the work of so eminently prosaic and commercial a people as the American, his feeling was exactly that of an English housekeeper visiting an American House Beautiful. To all appearance the average American lady on her travels cannot be associated with a capacity for household management, for she poses

as a light, frivolous, petted creature with no soul for anything but the "having a good time." Nothing is further from the truth. This very daintiness is the quality which so admirably fits the American woman for the proper tenancy of a House Beautiful. Exquisite taste is more often displayed in the house of an American woman who has never crossed the Atlantic, than in the house managed by an English-woman familiar with the marvels of all the capitals of Europe. The art of tasty decoration seems innate in the American feminine soul. The eye is rarely offended by jarring colours, by inharmonious groupings and arrangements, by exaggerations, by ostentatious exhibition of costly belongings, by overloadings or by bare corners, by trumpery make-believes, or by over-studied carelessness. As the French cook can make a good dinner out of an English cook's refuse, so can an American lady do more with a few yards of drapery and lace and a few well-chosen objects of ornament, than many a well-educated, artistically trained Englishwoman with the command of an unstinted purse. Nor does constant contact with uneducated, unpolished bores with no souls above the conversion of one dollar into two, and no information beyond the range of the market, as are the lords of many of these American Houses Beautiful, seem to act prejudicially on the nicety and daintiness of the average American lady.

Moreover, she is as good a domestic manageress as she is a domestic beautifier, and not in the best regulated hotels do things work more smoothly than in most American houses. How it is done is not at first apparent to the visitor—say an English housewife who can only keep her establishment in comparative order by giving her entire mind and time to it, by fussing and fuming from morning till night, by keeping ears and eyes continually strained, by, in fact, making herself the servant of her servants, for the life of an American woman is to all appearances simply a life of self-indulgence, of shop-dawdling, of social intercourse, of pleasure-taking. But that it is done is at once evident to anybody who has been the guest in an American House Beautiful.

AN EVIL EYE

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

"Is that your friend, Jim L'Estrange, Laurie?"

"Well, Madge, why not?"

"Nothing—only—he's not a bit like what I fancied!"

"In what way?"

"You never told me he had such a strange, sad face. I declare I never saw any one look like that!"

"Oh, as to that, he's not the luckiest fellow in the world."

"Not? I thought he was rich and young—had come in for a good fortune——"

"Yes. But hang it all, Madge, money isn't everything."

Madge Lifford raised her delicate, sarcastic eyebrows.

"No? I fancied we fin-de-siècle people had agreed it was! Will you tell me what's wrong with your peculiar-looking friend?"

"Perhaps—some time—but I don't know myself all about him. I've only just picked him up again, as it were, since he came back to England."

"Well, you used to rave about him. We girls always were dying to see your grand hero—you can't wonder we formed an ideal. I pictured a sort of delightful Gay Livingstone—Rhoda Broughton creature, and I see——"

"Well, what? I'm sure he's good-looking enough?"

"Good-looking? Hum—I don't know. He's got a lovely profile, I grant you, like a first-rate bit of sculpture, but that mahogany-coloured complexion——"

"He's been in Africa—Australia——"

"And those curious light-blue eyes, the weirdest eyes! No! You may call him handsome, after a fashion, but not good-looking, Laurie!"

"I call him so," the brother retorted brusquely, as brothers do.

"You're sure he's not a villain?"

"You ridiculous little animal! Old Jim—the most generous, kindest chap in the world! He'd do anything for a pal."

"Well, if I had to describe a villain in a novel I should make him just exactly like your beloved Jim L'Estrange——"

"Hush!" The angry caution came too late. Miss Madge's ringing voice travelled pretty far, and she was not aware that Mr. L'Estrange had approached them to greet his school friend, who was excessively wroth with his sister, for he was certain from the peculiar expression on the other man's face that he had heard her candid comment. Madge got a little red, but she carried it off as usual with a high hand. She and her brother were staying with a

county family, the Brandons, of Elstead Hall, who were entertaining a few friends with a small and early dance. On this occasion Laurence Lifford and Jim L'Estrange had met again after a period of several years. The former greeted his friend with hearty cordiality, which Madge thought he received a little coldly; he had certainly a reserved, hesitating, and unexpansive manner. "This is my sister, Jim; it's a funny thing you never met before."

Mr. L'Estrange bowed profoundly, and with great gravity, though Madge thought she had detected a gleam of amusement in his peculiar light eyes. She was a young person used to conquest, and with an appetite for admiration, and her brothers had never succeeded in snubbing her as they conscientiously tried to do. She was pretty, lively, "chic"; she had great coolness and frankness of demeanour, could dance and dress to perfection. Naturally the average young man did not hold out against these attractions. But she felt dubious about this young man, who puzzled and piqued her. He did not hurry to engage her for dances; on the whole he seemed more eager to talk to Laurie. She felt aggrieved, and perhaps something in her hazel eyes told him so, for as she met him, he asked her to be good enough to spare him the next waltz.

"But I'm afraid," he added, "I'm not up to modern form—I haven't danced for three years. I've been wandering about in uncivilised places where they only dance corroborees."

"I wish you'd teach me how!"

"I'm afraid it would hardly look as graceful in Mrs. Brandon's drawing-room as in an African clearing. If I make a great mess of waltzing you must forgive me, Miss Lifford—one soon drops out of civilisation."

"Ob, if only one could, it would be such fun!"

He smiled.

"You think so? Well, I don't know; there isn't much fun in savagery, except for a change."

"You don't look as if you found much fun in anything!" Madge said, in her audacious way. She wanted to "get a rise" out of Mr. L'Estrange, but only succeeded in making Laurie scowl. His friend snubbed her by apparently not hearing what she said, as he went on calmly to make some observation on some local event to Lifford. Madge decided that she disliked the man; that she always

did dislike Laurie's particular friends; and, glancing at him disapprovingly, she wondered what on earth made old Laurie choose a chum so utterly unlike himself.

"I wonder now what he is, if not a villain," Madge thought, "for he is something unlike other people. I'm positive of that. Perhaps a spiritualist; a hypnotist; a theosophist; some sort of queer, uncanny new light. I'll pump him. I'm awfully anxious to find out what theosophy is. So far, all I know is something connected with teacups and a most repulsive-looking old woman. If he's that he shall explain it to me; if he hypnotises he shall try his skill on—on some one else. I'm not going to let any one make a fool of me and order me to do ridiculous antics just for the fun of showing off."

Mr. L'Estrange danced lightly, but his step was certainly not quite up to date, and Madge, preferring talk at any time to almost every other amusement, soon contrived to come to an anchor in a quiet nook, where she proceeded to try her hand, with marked ill success, at "pumping" Laurie's chum. Mr. L'Estrange was the most difficult man to get things out of she had ever met, yet she felt sure it was only that the machinery was hard to work, not that the material to be worked was not there. She skilfully led the conversation to modern magic, informed him that a certain doctor there, whom she pointed out, was great at hypnotism—had Mr. L'Estrange any experience of the thing?

"None," he answered carelessly.

"Did you ever try your hand at it? I somehow formed a notion that you would succeed——"

He looked at her rapidly, then turned his eyes away; he was remarkably chary of meeting Miss Madge's expressive and well-practised glances.

"Never. Why should you imagine this? If I had the smallest power of the sort I should be more than careful never to attempt to exercise it."

"But why? They say it is often a most valuable force——"

"H'm—I doubt that. I am sure its danger must be greater than its value."

"Don't you believe that some people have curious powers over others?"

There was a slight but marked pause. When he spoke it was, Madge felt, in a markedly artificial tone, with a little laugh.

"People like you, Miss Lifford, must be quite aware that they have!"

"Oh, you tiresome wretch!" thought Madge, "there's no drawing you anyhow." Aloud she remarked, haughtily disregarding the implied and conventional compliment, that she had seen most curious things in mesmerism, and she really did not see much difference between that and this hypnotising, which seemed only a new name for the same thing. "Isn't it odd," she went on, "in these most sceptical, agnostic times that there are such strange beliefs and superstitions afloat? These theosophists, now——" she paused a moment; he showed no interest. Apparently he was not one of the occult either. "Do you know anything about them?"

"No, barely anything. I don't pretend to understand such mysteries."

Madge talked on, piqued at discovering so little, touching first one subject, then another, in her airiest and liveliest fashion. He seemed amused, he was very polite, but he showed no real interest till she touched upon Laurie and their friendship of old. Then the thin brown face lit up, and a strange fire came into the weird light eyes.

"Dear old man! I don't know a better sort than Laurie anywhere."

"You will be interested in hearing that he is just engaged."

"No, really? Is he? I am glad! I hope he'll be as happy as he ought to be. Who is it?"

"She's a niece of Mrs. Brandon's—Georgie Brandon, a very nice, jolly, unsophisticated girl. I think Laurie really is lucky."

"He always was. Good old Laurie always fell on his feet."

"You believe in good luck, not in the moral little stories that insist on good conduct?"

"Yes," he said slowly, and in a dull sort of voice, "I believe in good luck." Then he abruptly changed his tone and asked a shoal of questions about Laurie. Madge found herself drawn on to tell him about their jolly life at home, about her four brothers, the noise and fun that went on. "Do you know what a big family is? Have you many at home?"

"No—there are only my mother and myself. But I never am at home."

"You have a nice place somewhere, haven't you?"

"Yes—but I don't stay in it. My mother and a companion live there. I wander about the world."

"But some day you will settle down; you won't be always wandering?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear I shall. One doesn't lose the trick."

The next opportunity Madge had of finding her brother alone she began at once about his friend. She declared she didn't like, she even positively disliked him; he was horribly unresponsive and cold, yet he occupied her mind a good deal, simply as a problem, a puzzle. Madge's nimble and alert brain loved puzzles.

"You said you would tell me what you meant by his being unlucky."

"Well, I don't know that I can exactly. I don't remember what it was that always made people think him so, the idea somehow stuck to him. I suppose it began by—it was a horrid thing to happen to a fellow. I don't like to talk about it, but mind you don't mention it to a soul, Madge!"

"I won't. I can be as dark as any one when I choose."

"He was only a kid when it happened, twelve or thirteen; I met him first at that preparatory school, you know, at Esher. The first term he and his twin brother Ralph were both there; they had no father—people used to say there was something queer about the way he died—and this twin, who was half an hour older than Jim, was heir to the property. He was a bad-tempered chap rather, but jolly enough when he wasn't riled, and awfully handsome. Jim was immensely fond of him; and when they quarrelled, as brothers must, Jim always caved in. Well, in the summer holidays they two went out rabbiting, and somehow or other Jim's gun went off—he tripped, I believe, as they were going through a hedge—his gun flew up, and the charge went through Ralph's head——"

Madge uttered an exclamation of horror. Laurie's usually cheerful face was grave enough.

"Ay, it was a frightful thing. They say it nearly killed Jim. He was off his head for a bit, and he didn't come back to school next term. I did hear that his mother never felt the same for him afterwards; she is, I fancy, a queer sort of woman. Ralph was her pet, and she couldn't get over it with poor Jim. That was the first blight on the fellow, but somehow I don't know that it was the last. I've heard rumours—I am not sure of any of them except another

thing that happened at school. We met at Winchester afterwards. A ball from Jim's bat took a fellow on the side of the head, and killed him soon after. It seemed the most accursed luck, he always had it. Yes, I remember another thing; Jim brought scarlet fever back with him from home, and young Brooks died of it. He had it mildly himself, so had I. One night—we slept next each other in the infirmary—I heard him crying and asked him what the row was. After a bit I got it out of him. He was awfully cut up because he was getting better; Brooks was worse. 'He'll die, you'll see he will,' he said, 'and I can't. There's heaps of people to care about Brooks, and none about me, so he'll die and I shan't. That's how things go, and I hate everything!' Poor old Jim! I wasn't out of it when I said he was unlucky, was I? but I hope times will change, or have changed, with him. I've pretty well lost sight of him, so I don't know."

Madge for once was silent, she looked pale and troubled. Lightly as she took life, heartless as she seemed, sometimes there were moods of higher feeling in her, and Laurie's story, coming upon her vivid impression of L'Estrange's curious personality, stirred them. Three lives, three young happy lives destroyed, and he the miserable cause! That little bald narrative of the scene in the infirmary seemed to her almost unbearably sad to think of. She did so hate being obliged to feel sad!

"I can understand your feeling awfully sorry for him, Laurie," she said after a pause, "but what made you fond of him?"

"I believe that began it," he answered simply, "being so sorry for him. Then he was such a generous fellow, he hadn't anything but he wanted to give it away; he spent half his time helping any one over work, and he was so confoundedly obliged to one for sticking to him; yet he wouldn't ever chum up, or be really intimate with one. Brave, too, he was, tremendously brave! He'd stand up to a fellow twice his size and take the foolhardiest risks. Just because he didn't seem to care whether he broke his neck or not, he never did. Oh, I don't know exactly why, but I was always fond of Jim L'Estrange!"

"He makes me feel uncomfortable somehow—ill at ease."

"Because he won't flirt with you," her brother retorted with fraternal brutality.

"As if I wanted him to!" with indignation. "I don't say he mayn't be nice—when you know him."

"Oh, he's not nice. I detest your nice men. Poor old Jim's a thundering good sort. If I were in a hobble, I'd go to him sooner than any one in the world. I shall ask him to be my best man."

"Shall you?"

"Yes, if your ladyship has no objection."

"That wouldn't make much difference. Did you introduce him to Georgie the other night?"

"No, I didn't get the chance, but Mrs. Brandon has asked him to our river picnic to-morrow. He tried to back out of it—that's his way—but I wouldn't let him; he ought not to be a hermit, it only makes him morbid."

The Brandons' house was close to a pretty river for boating, and part of the summer programme included frequent picnics, which were most popular among the light-hearted young folks who laughed, played, and made love through the long sunny days. They were all ready at the boathouse, where the several boats were waiting for their crews, and the difficult question of sorting people was pretty well settled before Mr. L'Estrange made his appearance. Laurie had decided to take Georgie, Madge, and his friend Jim in his boat, and called out to him to make haste as the others were starting. Madge was looking a little intently at the new-comer, who, though got up much like the rest, somehow looked different from them all, and she felt piqued to perceive a visible drawing back.

"Am I to go in that?" he said. "I thought I was to have a canoe."

"No. Jack Brandon bagged it. You unsociable beggar, you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself! Come on. Let me introduce you to Miss Georgina Brandon; my sister you know. Be quick! we ought to have started."

Jim L'Estrange bowed in silence. He did not look at either of the girls, but took his place without a word. Madge felt cross; she was not used to finding men thus unwilling to enter her company, yet the very snub stimulated her to effort. Georgie chose to row, and took the stroke oar to Laurie's bow, so Mr. L'Estrange had no choice but to sit beside Madge and listen to her light and airy chat. He listened and smiled, but did not say much, nor did he more than occasionally glance at her. He gave her an impression of avoidance, yet

there was nothing in his manner that was not courteous and considerate, even to deference.

"I believe he's afraid of being more than coldly civil," Madge told herself. The atmosphere of happy lightness, however, had its effect. Jim L'Estrange warmed; he once or twice laughed a low, curious laugh. It seemed to Madge as if something frozen had thawed in his strange, light eyes. He watched Laurie and Georgie with an affectionate sort of interest, remote, yet genuine. When they landed on the spot chosen for dinner, the lovers naturally wandered off, and Madge drew Mr. L'Estrange's notice to them with a smiling glance.

"Good old chap!" he murmured, "he does look happy. I hope he will be the same ten years hence."

"He wants you to be his best man—you know the wedding is to be in September?"

"Me!" He started with a sudden look of alarm, a sudden pallor. "Oh, no, that is quite impossible. I must put him off that."

"Impossible! Why, on earth? What can you mean?"

"Oh—why—nothing—only that I shan't be in England."

"An afterthought—that was not your reason," thought Madge. She said aloud: "Laurie will be much disappointed then; he has set his heart on you."

"It's awfully good of him, but Laurie has troops of friends; he will have no difficulty. It is quite out of the question for me."

"A man likes to have his particular friend—you were always Laurie's hero."

He laughed under his breath.

"What an extraordinary one to choose!"

There was a world of concentrated bitterness in both laugh and tone. Madge, perverse Madge, was conscious of a sudden sensation of compassion that almost amounted to kindness. Faulty, perverse she was, but she could not spoil a truly kind and soft heart. She drew a little near to him; she looked at him now, not coquettishly, but with genuine, honest sweetness.

"One doesn't choose, does one, exactly?" she said softly. "One cares for people one knows not why. And Laurie really does care for you."

"Oh, I'm sure of it! I'm sure of it!" he cried emphatically. "My miserable school-life would have been intolerable without Laurie."

"Then, if you are truly such friends,

why should you refuse to be at his wedding?"

"Why?" he repeated in an undertone. "Just for that very reason, to be sure."

"What can you mean?"

She never knew if he would have answered her, for they were at that moment drawn into the crowd. Dinner was ready, and serious conferences had to end. There was one other incident at the meal that drew Madge's attention again. Some gentleman present had been travelling in Greece, and was telling his experiences to Mrs. Brandon. Madge was in the middle of some speech, which she was piqued to find Jim was not attending to. She glanced up at him, and saw that he was intently listening to what the traveller was saying. She listened, too. He was talking about the superstitions of the village; how the peasant mothers disliked hearing their babies praised, and would spit on them or revile them for fear of the evil eye.

"A sort of idea of Nemesis, I suppose. The dread of being too happy and raising the ire of the gods—the old Apollo rage which destroyed Niobe's children. But that evil eye is a queer thing. There was a man in the village who was supposed to have it. He was not a bad man, and not hated. No; they only shunned him. He could not help it, they thought. It was not wickedness, only a curse on him that he brought disaster. Of course I pooh-poohed it; of course I didn't believe it. But an odd thing happened. A mere coincidence, no doubt, but odd. I had bought a young horse, a fine, sound creature, without a blemish, as far as I could see, and I was trying it one day. I went for a good gallop, and got near the village about sunset. As I turned the corner of a winding, rocky path that led to the place, I came upon this man. He was a curious-looking, melancholy fellow, with, I must say, the strangest, wildest eyes. Perhaps a touch of insanity in him, but harmless and mild enough. He was sitting on a stone by the wayside, and got up as I turned. The horse shied at him a bit, and as he came near to pass on, swerved right round and started off. We hadn't gone many paces before he suddenly dropped under me. I got off and looked at him. He was stone dead!"

There was a general exclamation. Madge was looking at Jim L'Estrange, and could not take her eyes away, for something terrified her that she saw there.

"Yes, stone dead!" repeated the gentleman, calmly helping himself to some strawberries. "After that it was useless arguing against the evil eye. The horse had nothing the matter with him; the peasants said he died of that one glance. Of course, it's utter bosh. One doesn't believe in it, but so it happened."

"Why not believe in it? It's true!"

Jim L'Estrange spoke as if he could not help it; strongly, yet quite calmly. Then, before any one could answer him, he got up and carried the fruit to the other side of the party. Something changed the current of talk, and no more passed on the subject, but Madge could not forget it. She had her clue. She now understood, or thought she understood, what marked Jim L'Estrange from the general run of people.

THE MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL.

IN THREE PARTS. PART II

FROM LIVERPOOL TO MANCHESTER, BY WATER.

EARLY on the first of January, I left Manchester for Liverpool by train, to make the journey back to Manchester by canal. There were a few hundreds of others bound in like manner for the Prince's Landing Stage—with picnic baskets, wraps, and umbrellas, and abounding good spirits.

We had one brief glimpse of the Manchester Docks as we skirted them. Then the January mist closed about us. There were streaks of promise in the gloomy heavens, however, which put hope in our hearts. Even as it was, though cold, the weather was kind for the first day of the year.

A man may just as well look at his fellow-travellers all the way between these two huge cities of Lancashire as seek graces of landscape outside the train window. To persons like Mr. Ruskin this part of England must be a positive infliction. The "blight" of modern inventions is upon it.

"'Blight' indeed!"—a thoroughbred Lancashire man might well retort. "If money, and trade, and the good things that follow in their wake are a scourge, scourge me with them till I cry 'stop.'"

In Liverpool there was a glint of sunshine.

Down by the Mersey the air cut cold from the water, but the fog was thick.

So, too, was the crowd of adventurous pleasure-seekers. Half-a-dozen steamers, with bunting from their masts and music sounding on their decks, were taking passengers aboard—or rather getting them impelled aboard.

"For goodness' sake don't push behind like that," cried a portly gentleman in the midst of the strife at the "Fairy Queen's" gangway. It was noticeable, however, that even while he spoke, he rammed himself against the person in front of him like an oarsman straining at his oar.

You see, there were to be six hundred of us, and, of course, there was not likely to be sitting room for half six hundred. It was a case of "the foremost get the seats." The voyage was sure to be somewhat lengthy although but forty miles in distance. To stand exclaiming "Oh!" and "ah!" "wonderful!" "a stupendous undertaking!" and the like for five, six, or seven hours on end, was not a prospect steeped in enchantment.

The rest of Liverpool looked on at our departure with much unconcern. We alone were decorated. The big "Teutonic" lay over against us in mid channel, like a dead thing. Even through a glass, no sign of life appeared on her, and this at half-past nine on a fine winter's morning!

But we had compensation in other quarters. The crimson sun stole up from the smoke, and set the imagination at work at the same time that it dulled the sense of cold that came keenly from the river. Tall chimneys showed through the vapour, and there were shadows even of Birkenhead across the water. Fishing ships went by with their lead-coloured sails all set, moving quietly before the east wind. And the Mersey danced beneath the "Fairy Queen's" bulwarks in opaline ripples—blue, purple, fire colour, and green all in a twinkling—and dignified the city round about us and that other city now wedded to the sea by Mersey and bold capitalists combined.

It was a scene that C. W. Wyllie, the famous painter of Thames barges and Thames fog effects, would have taken a professional interest in.

We were a strangely-assorted crowd: gentlemen in bearskin coats who had the air of directors, young ladies in very late fashions and high-heeled shoes, knots of the Liverpool young men about town with jests cascading from their lips, and not a few stout commonplace women with their husbands, who began to eat sandwiches

and refer to bottles the moment our paddles made a stir.

We sang "The Conquering Hero" as a start—at least some of us did. It was a little trying for Liverpool, but that great city did not resent the slight. "The Conquering Hero" recurred frequently. We had it, I believe, at every lock, and now and then we echoed it second-hand, either from the crowd on the banks or the choir on board another steamer. It did as well as anything else, however, and was certainly as appropriate at least as "Auld Lang Syne." There were also "Daisy Bell" and "After the Ball." Two young women with wide mouths, and two lads with fiddlers, conspired against us with these touching airs. The occasion was one for reckless generosity. The coppers these itinerant musicians took on board the "Fairly Queen" ought to have kept them all in clover for a week.

Meanwhile, we are rapidly going up stream. The training-ships are passed. So, too, are the powder magazines, fast moored in the river. Bunches of holly or mistletoe decorate the tops of the masts of these vessels. The growing freshness of the air, as we get away from the shelter of Liverpool's crowded wharves and masses of building, also tells of the season.

And so to Eastham in quick time. A fringe of trees on the banks hints at the vernal and midsummer graces of the water-side resort. So does a cottage with large letters on its wall telling of teas and hot water. The fog has mainly lifted. The bright red of the bricks of the Canal buildings is cheerful to see—much more so, indeed, than the puddy ripple of Mersey's smutty water against the banks beneath the tea-garden cottage. The unpleasant water has dyed the banks black to the high tide mark. One would almost scruple to drown the most delinquent of dogs in such a fluid.

Nothing could have been simpler than our entrance into and exit from the Eastham lock. We were hailed by the lock master, who asked our name and the nature of our cargo—though his eyes might have enlightened him on both points—and then the massy gates of tropic greenheart wood were closed betwixt us and the tidal river. Officials in brand new uniform and two or three score sight-seers—mostly little children from the neighbouring village—looked down upon us in the depths of the lock. But we were soon above them, and then with

a cheer we departed from Eastham. The wind blew strong across the river and made red noses the rule with us. There was, however, jollity enough.

As touching this, a meditative gentleman with bleared eyes observed to me:

"There's no county in England where the people have such high spirits as in Lancashire. I don't care where you go, you'll never find them the same as at Liverpool. It's fun all the day long, that's what it is. It does a body good to see 'em."

My friend referred especially to the waggish doings of a certain person, who had just packed up the fag ends of his breakfast in the cover of the penny weekly with the appropriate title of "Tit-bits," and pinned the small parcel, with the printed title outside, to the coat-tail of a drowsy and rather fat man, who suspected nothing less than that he was being made the butt of a score or two of his fellow-countrymen. This deplorable dupe went to and fro about the boat for an hour, heedless of the grins that greeted his back. At length he sat down, and crushed the broken victuals asunder from him.

I dare say Lancashire is a more witty part of the realm than it has credit for being. Still, this particular sample of humour did not seem to strike a top note.

For a mile or two we had nothing to admire in the Canal, save the expensive embankment on the Mersey side. For most of the distance to Runcorn, in fact, this embankment has had to be continued. It is composed of enormous masses of sandstone and granite. The embankment cuts off the view of the Lancashire shore of the Mersey. But the deprivation is a bearable one.

At Ellesmere Port there is a dry dock, and a ship was being repaired in it. There was a suspicion of make-believe about this piece of work. It looked as if the vessel had been mounted, and the men set hammering at its hull, more for the sake of the trippers on this, the opening day, than because she was really in need of repairs. But, of course, it was not so. The Canal Company means to earn a dividend just as soon as it can.

Ellesmere Port is noteworthy, apart from its docks, as being the outlet into the Ship Canal of the Shropshire Union Canal; which traverses Cheshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire, with connections into Worcestershire and the south. This promises to be an important place on the Canal.

More embankments, the crossing of a couple of small rivers and a few miles of country of no particular interest, and Saltport is reached. We are here at the mouth of the river Weaver—a considerable stream.

The name Saltport speaks for itself. The various "wiches" of Cheshire send their white cargoes hither for shipment. The Weaver was a useful thoroughfare of trade before the Ship Canal crossed it and offered it the hand of alliance. Here are the ten Weaver sluices in connection with the Canal, adapted to let loose fifty thousand cubic feet of water per second.

From Saltport on to Runcorn we are in the midst of business. The Weston and Runcorn Canal runs parallel with the Ship Canal, and the famous Bridgewater Canal—now the Ship Canal's property—lowers itself by a series of locks to connect with the other two canals. One dock succeeds another. Steamers and sailing vessels are taking or unloading cargo. Everywhere flags are to be seen, and crowds of inquisitive folks stare at us as we pass them by.

Runcorn the dismal is at hand. Its gigantic railway bridge here crosses the Mersey to Widnes on the north side. Tall chimneys volley smoke towards the clouded heavens alike here and at Widnes. The river looks less and less attractive; for the tide is out, and the miles of black sand sparkling with greasy stains, and with the murky stream flowing between these ugly banks, do not make up a picture of delight.

However, every yard shows us more of man's triumph over Nature. The great railway bridge alone is a fillop to human pride. A train hurtles over it as we flutter our flags beneath it. The passengers wave their handkerchiefs to us. Runcorn's population also for the moment forget their far from Arcadian modes of life, and salute us from the sandstone banks, up which the red houses of the town climb to the level of the high bridge. The air reeks with chemicals.

From the first of the swing-bridges, just east of the other bridge here, we are hailed with a distant cheer, and the people are hustled off it by the custodians, and its five hundred and seven tons of iron turn calmly on their axis to let our masts pass, with nothing betwixt them and the faded blue of the heavens.

Hence to Manchester we are never without spectators of our passage, and their numbers increase as we cover the miles.

The run from Runcorn to Latchford is a nearly straight one of about ten miles, with no lock intervening. In fact, from Eastham to Latchford—twenty-one miles—there is no lock. But there are in all four swing-bridges, which we have to warn of our coming with eerie shrieks and whistles.

Now, however, we are getting fast on the trail of other steamers. There are also boats in our rear. It seems likely that we shall be badly delayed at Latchford. Among the steamers the "Albatross," of the General Steam Navigation Company, looms large. This is the trial trip of that company too; the captain of the "Albatross" seems none too sure that the Canal is large enough for his boat. But he is disabused when he finds himself thrust into the lock at Latchford with two or three other boats nearly as big as his own, and hoisted as if he were a feather weight.

The cutting from Runcorn to Latchford is not suggestive of difficulty. The banks are, in places, at a sharp incline, and in places perpendicular. Wattles have been used extensively to bind the artificial banks into solidity. The sandstone is ochre-coloured and a warm red. Here and there, of course, one sees more of the careful brickwork embedded into the natural banks, which, as much as anything, tells of the solicitude with which engineers and contractors have worked together. All the bricks used in the Canal are of a bluish tint. In all, some twenty million have been required to make up one hundred and seventy-five thousand cubic yards of brickwork.

There is not much population on this reach—holiday spectators apart. The north bank is still wholly in the hands of the contractors. Little locomotives are to be seen gliding up and down, with their chains of loaded trucks after them. Steam navvies lift their repulsive bulk here and there. Short rows of residential sheds tell, moreover, of the two-legged navvies who have been here camped by their work—with their wives and families, and domestic cats and fowls—for the last two or three years at least. The women folk from these frail temporary abodes—of which even a vagabond American would not hold a lofty opinion—flutter their shawls at us, and their children shout to us. Their husbands, too, desist for a moment from their spade work to give us a flourish of the arm.

Nearing Latchford we leave on the left—though hidden from us in our sandstone cutting—the extensive works which are to make Warrington a shipbuilding depot. Already the various lines of railway about us have become confusing. Trains are seen on both sides of the Canal, two or three running parallel with each other, and crossing the Canal on the great High-level bridge by Latchford, and also behind us toward Warrington.

These tokens give rise to significant conversation among the experienced ones on board the "Fairy Queen." What duels, to be sure, had to be fought over this ground between the Canal Company, seeking its right of way, and the different railway companies which, inimical to the Canal from the very start, were likely to oppose, tooth and nail, its pretensions to disturb the existing condition of their lines! But they saw things otherwise in Parliament, and the railway directors have had to submit to their lines being altered and bridges built for them. They had some set-off in the claims for compensation that they were allowed to make. And, according to many experts, they used this opportunity of bleeding their enemy to the utmost.

Thousands and tens of thousands of people watch our progress into the Latchford locks. The crowd are perilously near the walls of the Canal. To us it seems that very little pressure from behind will urge them into the water by hundreds at a time. But nothing happens. Nothing, that is, except a fusillade of jokes and congratulations; a bit of a bump as either our helmsman or our neighbour's goes momentarily wrong; and our helpless exposure to a score of cameras as we lend life and, I hope, dignity to the picturesque scene in the lock.

Some one is hurt, however. The ambulance engine speeds to the front and men dash at a stretcher. We see the victim being supported betwixt two men as we glide quietly away towards the next lock. It would be odd if such a day were lived through without a few accidents.

Irlam is the next lock—seven and a half miles more towards Manchester. The characteristic feature of this stage is our ultimate association with the Mersey, much diminished in width after Runcorn is passed. We cross it, and for a mile or two absorb it, and then let it meander away finally to the south just ere we reach Irlam.

Mersey is not a pretty stream, and Irlam, which mates with it by Irlam, is still less pleasing to look upon. How should they be otherwise, with so much of the sewage of Manchester and other towns entering them unabashedly? For dead dogs, and other such undesirable flotsam and jetsam, they must take almost premier rank in the land. Their colour, too, is profoundly against them. Near Manchester poor Irlam is constrained into a cascade. Nothing could be more humiliating to the unsavoury stream than the contrast of its dirty bubbles and unwholesome-looking fringe of leaden spume with the glorious snow-white of a Norwegian cataract.

Between Latchford and Irlam comes Partington. This is destined to be a useful spot. Its coal basin may prove as profitable as any other of the Canal's sources of revenue. The Wigan coalfield will now naturally connect with the Canal, which is only a few miles distant. There is also the Haydock field, which is reputed to have an upper crust of four hundred and fifty-two million tons of coal, and which is to be joined to the Ship Canal by a railway. Hitherto much of this Lancashire coal has gone to Garston on the Mersey—nearly opposite Eastham—at a cost of one shilling and ninepence per ton. It will cost but ninepence to be tipped on board steamers at Partington.

From Irlam to Barton locks the distance is only two miles. But we made it very slowly. The banks on both sides of the Canal were lined with people. The smoke of Manchester was already in the air, and Manchester's enthusiasm too. We were now well in procession. Welsh boats laden with slate and granite, and the most frightful steam-whistles imaginable, and other cargo-boats sandwiched us. Noise ran riot. Steamer after steamer joined in the diabolical concert of steam-whistling, and the people clamoured their approval of these ear-cracking ecstasies of civilisation.

The tumult almost made me oblivious of one of the most astounding achievements in the Ship Canal's works. Here at Barton the Bridgewater Canal crosses its greater ally by a swing-bridge. This means that every time a tall-masted steamer goes up or down the Ship Canal, a section of the Bridgewater Canal, two hundred and thirty-five feet long, six feet deep, and nineteen feet wide, is insulated—if a land term can be applied to water—and turned on a pivot. The weight of the

bridge and its water is one thousand four hundred tons. Ships of light draught may thus be seen sailing over the Ship Canal, with other ships beneath them.

This aqueduct has been substituted for the famous Brindley's bridge, which here carried the Bridgewater Canal over the Irwell some forty feet above the latter stream.

Mode Wheel Locks served us as the ante-chamber to the great docks of Manchester.

Until this day I had failed to grasp the idea of Manchester's magnitude, audacity, and populousness. It seemed as if the inhabitants of a metropolis were on the banks here alone, and especially by the docks with their imposing length of border.

More cheers and steam-whistling, and we were landed, after a voyage of about six hours.

At one of the side docks, reckless of the gala air of the bunting on all the sheds and all the ships, a steamer was discharging refined sugar. I could see no other cargo discharged or being laded. The sheds were still dense with the chairs that had earlier in the day seated the forty or fifty thousand shareholders and others, with their wives and relations. Ere long the world will be laid under tribute to fill these warehouses with the produce of every kind that Manchester craves, and is determined to have direct.

I shook hands with a casual acquaintance on the "Fairy Queen," whose destination was other than mine. He said he would not for anything have missed seeing what we had this day seen, and as we had seen it. That struck me as rather a large saying. But I quite agreed with him as valuing the impression this voyage had made upon the mind.

MISS GARTH.

A STORY IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER III.

It was observed by all that when Dalgarno came down to breakfast the next morning, he was in a very different frame of mind from his last night's mood. Whatever spell Jocelyn Garth had used, she had used it successfully. Dalgarno was deferential to herself, and entirely irreproachable in his manners to everybody else. He treated Lady Carstairs with an almost slavish humility, which, as the latter never cast so much as an eyelash in his direction, was so much humility lost.

"By the way, what became of Aveline last night?" asked Lady Carstairs, languidly eating game pie. "She did not come to the drawing-room as usual."

A flash of trouble stirred Jocelyn's eyes, as a flash of lightning might disturb the serenity of some still lake. But it passed so quickly that only Godfrey Wharton observed it.

"She was not very well. She had a headache," she answered briefly.

Lady Carstairs said no more, and the subject dropped. But Dalgarno, who had been listening attentively, pricked up his ears.

"Who is 'Aveline'?" he asked Rose Carstairs, who was sitting next him.

"Aveline Harberton," replied the young lady succinctly.

"Is she staying here?" asked Dalgarno impatiently.

"She lives here."

Rose Carstairs spoke to Dalgarno only when she was obliged, and then as shortly as possible. But when Dalgarno was bent on questioning he generally elicited answers.

"Is she Miss Garth's companion, then?"

"Miss Garth has no companion. Aveline is a child. Since her mother's death she has lived here always."

Dalgarno asked no more questions, but he had apparently found something to meditate about. He scrutinised Jocelyn's face every now and then with a puzzled look.

After breakfast most of the party hunted up their skates. The air was gloriously keen and clear—an air to make one drunk with exhilaration, as though with strong wine. A sharp frost had held an iron sway for weeks on the home ponds. There was much chatting, and laughing, and clinking of polished steel blades as the party made ready to start.

They were all going—every one of them, except Jocelyn herself and Lady Carstairs. Dalgarno, in an overcoat with a showy imitation sealskin collar, was swinging a pair of skates in his hand which he had borrowed from Godfrey Wharton, who happened to possess two pairs. He thought he might as well begin to enjoy himself as soon as possible. The little business with Jocelyn could wait. He was well pleased with his present quarters, and was in no hurry.

He had not skated for years. The ring of the metal on the clear black ice was as the trumpet of a war-horse to him. He was good at most physical exercises; he

had been debarred from the enjoyment of them for long. He made the most of every flying moment.

Jocelyn escaped to her boudoir the moment the chattering, merry, glad-hearted party had set off. She was perfectly aware that Lady Carstairs was only waiting to pounce upon her for an explanation of her own extraordinary leniency of the night before. She was only safe in her boudoir. That was forbidden ground to every one.

Once alone, Jocelyn threw herself down on a low couch with a moan of almost unbearable anguish. She had dreaded this moment for long years. It had come at last. The Iron Hand which crushes us all alike, which has no pity for the weak, no throb of divine compassion for the happy, had struck her down also. As she lay there death seemed infinitely preferable to the life that lay before her.

She sat up at last, her face ghastly in its pallor, her hands pressed to her aching head. She looked dully round at the exquisite room where she had collected all rare and beautiful things—a room absolutely unique in its priceless hangings, and wonderful china, and delicate exotic flowers. This room, like herself, had found a master.

A low tap at the door alarmed her, and set her heart beating fast. Who dared to disturb her here, in the solitude which she never allowed to be invaded? Could it be—? Her heart gave a sick throb.

"Come in," she said faintly.

She had expected to see the evil eyes and coarse, handsome face of her strange guest, but instead she met the firm blue eyes of Godfrey Wharton.

"May I come in?" he asked diffidently.

He had never been in that room before. It seemed to him almost like invading a shrine. Everything in it was a reflection of the mind that had planned it. Its delicacy, richness, purity, were all—Jocelyn Garth.

She bade him enter with a faint smile.

"I thought you had gone skating?" she said.

"I started—but I came back. You look so ill!" he added deprecatingly.

"It is only a headache," she answered; "you must not spoil your morning for me."

He hesitated.

"Of course there is no need to tell you that a morning with you means heaven for me," he answered, with a short laugh. "But I own I did not come back for that

alone. Dalgarno is cutting quite a dash on the ice," he added, in a different tone.

"I should have thought he would have been cutting figures instead," said Jocelyn, with an attempt at lightness.

He took no notice of it.

"I came back to see if I could help you," he said abruptly. "You cannot expect me to bear a repetition of last night's disgraceful scene! No man with blood in his veins could stand that a second time."

She turned a little paler.

"I do not think that it will occur again," she said in a low voice.

"How can you tell? How can you possibly guarantee even decent conduct from a drunken brute like that! He may insult you when I am not there—when there is no one near to defend you."

"You saw that I could manage him last night."

"Yes, but at what a frightful sacrifice! Do you want to go through such another scene again?"

"No."

"Then let me kick the brute out of the house! He is making you wretched, even ill. Give me authority to—"

"No. He must stay."

"Why, in Heaven's name?"

"Because there would be a worse scandal if he went than if he stays," she answered steadfastly.

He looked at her sharply. His eyes took in every detail of the weary face and drooping figure. A great love surged up within his heart, a longing wish to serve and cherish her; to bear her burdens for her; have her for his own, now and always."

"Jocelyn," he said steadily, "you know quite well that I love you. I have loved you for years, and you have kept me at a distance for years, why, Heaven only knows. Jocelyn! give me the right to guard and protect you, dearest."

He bent down, and taking her hand, pressed it to his lips. She tore it from him with a violent shudder.

"You must not! You must not!" she gasped. "Oh, I have tried to prevent this—you know how hard I have tried."

"Why?" He had let his hand fall to his side, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking at her. "Why?"

"I cannot tell you," she answered, hiding her face in her hands.

"I will have a reason. I insist upon it. It is my due. A woman does not throw over the man she loves for a mere whim."

"The man she loves?"

"Yes; you love me," he answered firmly.

She looked up at him with horrified, dilated eyes.

"And you ask me to give you the right to defend me against him?" she said, with a laugh that made him shudder.

"I do. Why should I not?"

"Because you, of all men, have the least right to do so."

"Why?" he repeated unmovedly, not taking his eye from the wild, white face before him.

She stood up suddenly, swaying a little, and leaning one hand on the back of the sofa for support.

"Because," she answered slowly, her gaze on the ground, her whole figure trembling with emotion, "because it is not my lover who must defend me against my husband."

Godfrey Wharton uttered a little inarticulate cry, and shifted his position slightly. The silence that followed was so intense that it seemed filled with vague, unearthly sounds.

At last he spoke.

"Your husband! That man! Am I dreaming, Jocelyn, or are you telling me the living truth?"

"It is true," she answered in a flat, lifeless voice.

He moved towards her.

"Sit down, Jocelyn," he said gently, "and try and tell me all about it. Perhaps I can help you even now."

She shook her head, but she obeyed him. He sat down on the sofa by her side and took her hand, speaking to her as he might speak to a child.

"Try and tell me all about it, dear. The burden is too heavy for you to bear alone."

Not a word of his own cruel disappointment; of the hopes cherished for years killed in one moment; of the fair dream-castle he had built, now reduced to the greyest of ashes. His only thought was for her.

Jocelyn began her story. She told it haltingly, but the kind hand that held hers seemed to give her strength and courage.

"I met him abroad first. He was a friend of Robert's. He is an Italian I believe, though I only know what he has chosen to tell me himself. I think Robert had some reason for wanting me to marry him—but I do not know. He fell in love

with me—and—and followed me to England. Robert stopped abroad, but he wrote to me and said that Dalgarno was a good fellow, and he hoped we should be married. I was just eighteen then."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Godfrey between his teeth.

"Well—we were married," she went on, in the same hopeless tones, taking no notice of his interruption, "we were married privately one morning, and no one ever knew anything about it."

She paused.

"I was not rich then. Uncle Anthony was still alive, and it was very uncertain as to whether he would leave his money either to Robert or me. He had many other relations, and we were very poor. At any rate there would have been no chance for me if he had known of my marriage. So Dalgarno persuaded me to keep it a secret."

She paused. Godfrey mutely noticed that she never called her husband by his christian-name. He felt an insanely overpowering curiosity to know what it was—what was the name that she had called him by in the days when she was Dalgarno's bride.

She went on.

"I was a governess then, teaching in a school in Harwich. I had to earn my own living, and there was no one to look after me. I went on teaching after we were married. We were in lodgings there for some time."

Her face flushed at the remembrance of those days, and he pressed her hand in silent sympathy. He dared not ask her if she had ever loved her husband. It was agony and shame to think that any other man had called her wife except himself.

"Dalgarno was never unkind to me, but he was away a good deal and I was left very much alone. One night, when we had been married about a year, he came home in a great state of excitement, and told me that he was being pursued—that there was a warrant out against him—that I must help him to disguise himself and escape. I did help him, and he got away. But only to be caught and brought back."

She covered her face with her hands with a shudder.

"Go on," said Godfrey, steadily. He must know all if he was to help her.

"He was caught. It was for forgery. He has been in prison for seven years."

So this man, this convicted felon, with the coarse sin-hardened face and seamed and scarred fingers, was the husband of the beautiful, gracious, refined woman before him, whom he had hoped one day to call his wife. Oh the pity of it!

She went on, still without tears.

"Soon after he—disappeared, Uncle Anthony died. He left me his whole fortune, because he said I was probably the only one of his relations who did not expect it. Then I came here and have lived here ever since."

"How did you know—he was out?"

"I did not know. He is out before his time. He behaved so well in prison!" she answered with a faint laugh. "But when he walked in yesterday—it seems centuries ago already—I did not even feel surprised. I knew that it would come some day. The sword has been hanging over my head for years. It has fallen at last."

He took her hand again.

"Poor child! Poor deceived child!" he murmured tenderly, "I can no longer be your lover, dear, but I am your friend always. We will fight this man together."

"He is difficult to fight," she answered dully, staring straight before her.

"The law cannot compel you to live with him."

She drew her head up proudly.

"I would rather die than live with him again—as his wife. But how can I prevent his presence here? I cannot turn my own husband out of doors."

"It must be done, nevertheless. You can give him money."

"I have offered it him, but he will not take it."

He smiled a little.

"In these enlightened days, Jocelyn, no woman is compelled to live beneath the same roof with a man whom she dislikes, even though he is her husband."

"No—I know," she answered, frowning a little.

"Well then, give him the money and let him go. It will have to come out I suppose about—I don't know why it should though. You could make it worth his while to keep quiet."

"He pretends to love me still!" She shuddered again. "I do not want to do anything yet—have a scandal before all these people. I want to get the house-party quietly over before I do anything."

"I understand."

Godfrey had kept his own love and jealousy well in the background until now. He was but human, and it burst forth.

"I cannot bear to think that such a man has called you wife! Oh, it is a bitter blow, Jocelyn. I would give my life to undo the past."

"The past can never be undone," she answered sombrely. "Don't you remember Dumas' words: '*Le passé est la seule chose pour laquelle Dieu est sans pouvoir.*' We can never escape the rash consequences of our own mad acts."

Godfrey looked at her—refined, "spirituelle," fair as a lily. By what strange charm had Dalgarno won her?

As he looked at her, she spoke again: this time her face was turned away, and her voice was only a hoarse whisper.

"He—he has a stronger hold still over me, only he does not know it! Godfrey, I have not told you all!"

"What is it?" asked Godfrey Wharton in terrified tones, an icy fear clutching at his very heart.

"When—my husband was in prison," said Jocelyn, "I—oh, Godfrey, cannot you guess?"

She turned her lovely, flushed face to his.

"Aveline——" she murmured, her eyes full of a divine mother-love that swallowed up all lesser feelings of regret and shame, "Aveline——"

"She is your child—and his!" murmured Godfrey Wharton, stumbling to his feet with wild eyes full of a despairing dread. "Oh, this is more than I can bear!"

A dull flush of jealousy and anger—the jealousy and anger that urge men on to kill—surged in his cheeks and made his heart beat thickly. Then it faded and left him deathly white.

He staggered from the room without another word. It was not a time for speech. Words would have choked him.

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